

Mediating jihadist conflicts

Conflict resolution and the global patterns of religiously defined
armed conflicts

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Abstract

The prevalence of jihadist armed conflicts – where rebels have taken up arms with explicitly Islamic aspiration – is a potent problem of our time. Yet, whereas jihadism has been extensively examined by security scholars, as well as theologians and scholars of religion more broadly, very little research has been done on the challenge of jihadism from a conflict resolution perspective. In particular, surprisingly little research has actually been done on explaining the conditions for conflict resolution processes in armed conflicts fought over religious incompatibilities in general, and Islamic aspirations in particular. This study examines the potential explanations for why peacemaking occurs in some circumstances of religiously defined conflicts, but not in others, as a way of drawing lessons for jihadist armed conflicts. Examining the occurrence of international mediation in all religiously defined (intrastate) armed conflicts between 1989-2013, with data originating from the UCDP, I find that the degree of internationalization decreases, while the duration of conflicts increases the chances for peacemaking in religiously defined conflicts. Discussing cases of contemporary peacemaking processes, the study reveals interesting variations supporting the notion that internationalization is the key in explaining intractability of religious disputes: 1) domestically (rather than international) oriented disputes are over-represented amongst the mediated ones; 2) domestically oriented factions (rather than transnationally oriented) within rebel-movements tend to be more open to engage in peace conflict resolution processes, and 3) in conflicts where internationalization has decreased over time, the parties' readiness to engage in peacemaking processes have correspondingly increased. Taken together, the study shows that the costs of conflicts and the internationalization are indeed key factors accounting for the openness – or lack thereof – for conflict resolution processes.

Introduction

The prevalence of *jihadist* armed conflicts is a potent problem of our time. Even though the frequency of conflicts with explicit religious dimensions has remained more or less constant over the last two decades – hovering about 20 conflict dyads per year – they still have not decreased to a similar extent as conflicts without religious incompatibilities. Seven of a total of ten major armed conflicts recorded last year (2014) by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) were so called jihadist conflicts: Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia and Pakistan. While the concept of ‘jihad’ is broad and carries many interpretations, it is here defined as a generic term for armed conflicts including Muslim rebel groups fighting for self-proclaimed Islamist aspirations (e.g. when the warring parties themselves express their political claims in such terms).¹ Thus, the international community seems overall less able to prevent, manage and resolve religiously defined conflicts, and the relative successes of conflict resolution processes in armed conflicts world-wide seem not yet to have translated into effective peacemaking strategies for sacred wars. It is important to study conflict resolution in religiously defined conflicts because we need to know more about under what conditions these types of conflicts can be amenable to conflict resolution processes. Given their prevalence, more knowledge about how effective conflict resolution processes can be designed is clearly needed. Much of this paper examines religiously defined conflicts broadly (that is, regardless of religious tradition) in order to shed light on the question of how jihadist armed conflicts can be resolved.

The lack of peacemaking practices for religiously defined conflicts is in line with a relative lack of scholarly knowledge about these types of conflicts. Whereas numerous studies have been done on religiously defined conflicts – primarily but not exclusively Jihadist conflicts –

¹ ‘Armed conflict’ is defined, in line with Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), as a stated incompatibility resulting in at least 25 battle-related deaths per calendar year, between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state.

through the prisms of either counter-terrorism / security, or theology, there is surprisingly little work done on Jihadist and other types of conflicts from the perspective of conflict resolution. One reason is that religiously defined conflicts are commonly seen as having a degree of intractability about them. They are usually interpreted as conflicts beyond the tools of conflict resolution practices, and therefore there is no apparent need to study them from this perspective either. Although it is at this stage relatively uncontroversial to claim that religious conflicts are more intractable than other types of conflicts, we know less about *why* this is the case. Answers that have been provided in previous research include explanations relating to extended time-horizons or religious outbidding (Toft 2006; Toft 2007), indivisibility (Hassner 2003; Hassner 2009), civilizational identities (Huntington 1996), or ideational ('cosmic') warfare (Juergensmeyer 1992; Juergensmeyer 2000). Yet, so far, relatively little empirical work has been done to try to test and explore the empirical bearing of these explanations.

This paper tries to address the issue why religiously conflicts are difficult to resolve. It does so by setting out to, more precisely, focus on the research question: *what are the conditions under which religiously defined conflicts are amendable to peacemaking processes?* This paper will examine the pattern of mediation in religiously defined conflicts broadly, trying to identify the implications for jihadist armed conflicts. It sets out to examine which types of sacred wars (or rather, situations of sacred wars) that are open for conflict resolution processes in the form of third-party mediation.

Examining the empirical record of the occurrence of international third party mediation (defined broadly) in internal armed conflicts 1989-2013, the study finds that religious commitments seem to impede peacemaking processes, but that it does not make such

processes impossible to come about. There is a significant difference between the prevalence of peacemaking initiatives in the form of third-party mediation, but the difference is not particularly dramatic, and there are quite a few of peacemaking instances in religiously defined conflicts. Zooming in on the group of religiously defined conflicts, the study finds that conflict duration increases, and internationalization decreases readiness to engage in peacemaking processes. Complementing the large n analysis, the paper also examines a set of contemporary cases of religiously defined conflicts, in order to better identify the causal processes, including the cases of mediation efforts in from Egypt (Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya), Algeria (AIS), Tajikistan (UTO), Palestine (Hamas), Afghanistan (Taleban), Thailand (Patani insurgents), Mali (Ansar Dine), Somalia (UIC), and the Philippines (MILF). These cases reveal three types of interesting variations supporting the notion that internationalization is the key in explaining intransigence of religious disputes: 1) domestically (rather than international) oriented disputes are over-represented amongst the mediated ones; 2) domestically oriented factions (rather than internationally oriented) within rebel-movements tend to be more open for engaging peace conflict resolution processes, and 3) in conflicts where internationalization has decreased over time, the parties' readiness to engage in peacemaking processes have correspondingly increased. Taken together, the quantitative analysis and the case studies reveals a general explanatory trajectory where the international dimension of religiously defined conflicts seem to be they key in explaining the occurrence of peacemaking processes.

It should be noted and clearly stated that with the use of the term jihadist armed conflicts I am not implying that the term jihad cannot, and in fact overwhelmingly is, utilized as describing an inner spiritual struggle and does not necessarily lend itself to armed conflict. Whereas this paper examines jihadist conflicts, readers should be clear on that 1) not all Muslim groups

taking up arms are fighting with explicit Islamist goals; and 1) most of the political groups with Islamist aspirations, do not take up arms, but try to achieve their political objectives through nonviolent struggles or constitutional processes. I recognize that the dual meaning of the term jihad complicates the interpretation of jihadist armed conflicts, but as this terminology is invariably utilized by the actors themselves, it is the best possible term to utilize at this point.

The paper is organized in the following manner. First I outline the main theoretical answers to why it is that religiously defined conflicts are difficult to resolve. Second, the study portrays the global picture through a statistical analysis of all religiously defined intrastate armed conflicts during the time period 1989-2013. In the third section, the main mediation efforts are described in short narratives, focusing on the conflict resolution process. In the fourth and last section, the conclusions – drawn both from the statistical analysis and the case narratives – are laid out.

Why Are Religiously Defined Conflicts so Difficult to Resolve?

Religious conflicts are exceptionally difficult to resolve. This is an idea that has significant traction inside as well as outside academia. Harpviken and Røislien identifies as a ‘key insight’ that ‘even if religion plays a limited role in initiating a conflict, it can nevertheless play an important role in perpetuating such a conflict once the latter is under way’ (Harpviken and Røislien 2008):359). Many other scholars have shared this line of thought. For example, religious conflicts, according to Fox (2004:58), can be intractable ‘due to the non-bargainable nature of the motivations behind them’.

The conjuncture that religious conflicts are difficult to settle through dialogue, negotiations and other forms of conflict resolution processes is an idea that also has received substantial empirical support. Recent works have examined whether religious dimensions of armed conflicts make them more durable (Tusicsiny 2004; Horowitz 2009), more devastating for civilian population (Toft 2007), or more intense (Pearce 2005; Nordås 2010), and less like to be settled through negotiated agreements (Svensson 2007, 2012).²

Less understood is *why* this is the case. In other words, why is it that *some* religious conflicts have parties who are open for conflict resolution, whereas other religious conflicts do not? There are several theoretical arguments / theories about the causes and dynamics of religious, and although none of them deal explicitly with the question of conflict resolution in religiously defined armed conflicts, it is possible to deduce propositions from their argument that can have bearing on, and help explaining, the occurrence of mediation in religiously defined conflicts. Hence, the ambition of this paper is to sketch out some possible explanations for the intractability of religious disputes, drawn on previous theories about the onset and occurrence of religious conflicts. One way of categorizing previous research is to relate it to the basic conceptual components of armed conflicts: the *issues*, the *parties*, and the *behavior* – the three components that is used to define armed conflicts (Wallensteen 2012).

Is it the issue?

One way of explaining the intransigence of religiously defined conflicts is to focus on the issue at stake. Public religious commitments to certain religiously defined positions of the parties relate to absolute values, from which it should be difficult to back down. Hasenclever and Rittberger (2000:119) argue that religious conflicts are difficult to resolve since the

² See also Toft (2007), who presents descriptive statistics indicating that the rates for negotiated settlement for civil wars where religion was central are lower than the average.

parties involved tend to perceive compromises as impossible. If parties have claimed divine sanctions for their engagement in violent interaction at the onset of the conflict, it should be difficult to engage in horse-trading, compromises, or integrative solutions later down the road. We could therefore expect that conflicts fought over religious issues in general should be associated with lower chances of engagement in conflict resolution processes.

Yet, the importance of the religious dimension in the conflict issue also varies across different conflicts (and potentially within the same conflicts over time). In some armed conflicts, the religious issues will be of central concern to the main controversy, whereas in other conflict situations, the religious issue will have a much more peripheral role. Toft (2007) has developed an argument that can be applied to the readiness to engage in conflict resolution in religiously defined conflicts. This is the model of *religious outbidding*, a theoretical model that focus primarily on explaining why religion become central in some conflicts but not in others. Political elites under threat and in need of external support can reframe the issue of contention in religious terms. Yet, and this is particularly important from the perspective of this study, once a religion becomes central, non-violent termination will also be less likely to occur (Toft 2007). Thus, if a religious issue is central to the conflict, rather than marginal, then it is less likely that the parties are ready to engage in conflict resolution processes in religiously defined conflicts.

Moreover, the problem can also be certain 'issue-bundles': that religious issues are mixed together with other contentious issues and that it is this mixture of religion and other issues that makes conflict resolution particularly difficult in religious disputes. Hassner's work on *indivisibility* is applicable in this context. Hassner focuses on sacred spaces, and not on religiously defined intrastate armed conflicts *per se*, as is the focus in this paper. Yet, his

theory has wider ramifications and implications. It is particularly when the religious sentiments of conflicts are mixed with the territorial aspects of conflicts that these types of conflicts can take on an indivisible form, hindering the resolution of conflicts. He suggests that ‘although secular territorial disputes lack the inherent characteristics that produce indivisibility in sacred spaces, rivals increasingly come to perceive territorial disputes as indivisible as time passes’ (Hassner 2009)160). Thus, we would from this argument expect that territorial issues would be among the least open of the religiously defined conflicts to conflict resolution processes. In other words, we could expect that in those religiously defined conflicts that also concern territorial issues, conflict resolution processes would be harder to come into place.

Is it the parties?

A controversial and much-debated thesis relating to religion is Huntington’ theory of the *clashes of civilization*. His work is mainly focused on predicting the conflicts and main tensions that will arise following the end of the Cold War. Yet, it also engages with the question of resolution of religiously defined conflicts. Huntington (1993:298) predicts that the immutable and exclusive character civilizational differences will make such conflicts less amendable to compromise and therefore conflicts with participants from different civilizations – ‘fault line wars’ – will not be settled through ‘comprehensive peace treaties that resolve central political issues’ (Huntington 1993:291), and by implication, mediated processes aiming for such treaties would also then be less likely to occur. Drawing on this line of thinking, we should expect that religiously defined conflicts with parties from different religiously traditions should be less open for conflict resolution processes.

Another explanation relating to the parties has to do with the degree of *internationalization*: if the fighting parties are supported by outside, external actors, and if such support implies that the domestic agenda is affected by the external actors. It could be the internationalization of religious conflicts that make them less likely to be open for peacemaking processes. This argument applies to religiously defined conflicts in general, and to Jihadist conflicts in particular. There are three reasons for why religiously defined conflicts that are internationalized to a high degree will be less likely to be open for peacemaking processes. The first reason is the ‘veto-player’ argument suggested by Cunningham (2006): more actors with ability to stop negotiated agreements will make such agreements and processes much more difficult and complex. This, of course, is not particular to religiously defined conflict: it would apply to all conflicts, including religiously framed ones. The second reason is that religious ideologies (in contrast to nationalist ideologies) are transnational to their character. This implies that religious revolts have propensity to spread beyond national borders and that transnational networks of religious militants have access and entry-points into originally local disputes. The third and final reason for why internationalization of religious conflicts makes them less likely to be open for peacemaking has to do with reputation costs for government coalitions, applicable to the context of the global war on terror. When governments are coalitions in the fight against militant Jihadist movements, then opening up negotiations in one particular context may have repercussions in others. Thus, the internationalization of religiously defined conflicts can impede peace attempts on both sides of the conflict. We could therefore expect that those religiously defined conflicts that are internationalized in terms of external support and participation would have lower chances for conflict resolution processes than other types of religiously defined conflicts.

Is it the behavior?

The last way to explain the intransigence of religiously defined conflicts can be by focusing, not on the issues or the parties, but on the conflict behavior and the subsequent dynamics of conflicts. This relates to the underlying question whether there is anything different with religiously defined conflicts, compared to other armed conflicts. We know from previous conflict resolution literature that the intensity of the fighting as well as the duration of conflict would create incentives for settling the conflict through other means than armed. From a rational cost-benefit analysis, religious militants, just as other types of militants, would react to the costs of conflicts and were these to increase, their willingness to seek negotiations would correspondingly be enhanced as well. Thus, conflict intensity would increase the incentives for settling the conflicts and seek alternatives routes beyond the costly encounters on the battle-fields. Zartman's (1995) work on ripeness in conflicts suggests that parties need to be incentivized by the costs of continuous engagement in conflict to be able to engage seriously in peacemaking and conflict resolution. Thus, belligerents in armed conflicts (religious as well as non-religious) should show an increased propensity for settling the conflict as the time passes. As time passes the war-weariness would increase (Mason and Fett 1996). Subsequently, the duration of conflicts and their intensity should be factors that increase the chances for peacemaking in religiously defined conflicts.

Yet, it may also be the case that religious militants are different than their more secular peers. Toft (2006) suggests that *time-horizons* can be applicable to explaining the longevity, intensity and intractability of religious conflicts. Religious militants, according to this argument, can be seen through the common rational choice perspective, but the rational choice theory needs to incorporate the fact that many religious militants have another assessment of time when engaging in fighting. The present is discounted, and the religious

militants would thereby be ready to engage in a more long-term fashion in the conflict. The main explanation behind the longevity behind religious conflicts and their inability to be effected by conflict resolution attempts, should therefore be found in the religious actors' perception that the current military confrontation is just an extension of a much longer battle, stretching over much longer (generational) time-eras. Following Toft's argument, we would not expect the duration of conflict to have *any* effect on the chances of conflict resolution: religious militants should then not react to conflict costs in a similar way as other types of belligerents. Hence, whereas duration of conflict will increase the change for conflict resolution in general, it will not affect the readiness for conflict resolution in religiously defined conflicts.

Contrasting perspectives to the rational choice models are, of course, also possible. For example, Juergensmeyer (1992; 2000) suggests that religious violence should be understood from the militants' ideological and religious frame. Violence performed in the sake of a religious cause is motivated from a wish to bring a divinely inspired order to the present disorder of contemporary society: religious militants are fighting a 'cosmic battle' between order and disorder. It is when this cosmic battle is mixed with the political turmoil of the societies in which the militants exist that the basic underlying logic for engaging in sacred wars occurs. Juergensmeyer's theory about cosmic battles does not explicitly discuss the conditions under which religiously framed conflicts are open for conflict resolution processes, yet, we would expect from his reasoning a close relationship between intensity of conflicts and the negatively likelihood peacemaking: it should be those religious conflicts that are perceived more in terms of cosmic battles that are both more intense and difficult to amend through negotiated processes.

Religiously Defined Conflicts and Conflict Resolution: The Global Picture

The discussion above has provided some tentative theoretical building-blocks that are useful in order to examine the occurrence of conflict resolution processes in religiously defined conflicts. In this study all religiously defined conflict between 1989 and 2013 are examined.³ By ‘religiously defined conflict’ the study means a religious dimension in the original incompatibility as explicitly stated at the onset of the conflict by the representatives of the primary parties. Examples include ISIS in Syria and Iraq, LRA in Uganda, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Hamas in Palestine, GAM in Indonesia (Aceh) and the Sikh uprising in India: thus, there is a quite broad variation within the category of religiously defined conflicts. It is, in their role of challenging the status quo, the rebel-side’s aspirations that are utilized in order to measure a religious conflict. Yet, that does not necessarily mean that it is the rebel side that is always making religiously framed demands, in some (but a minority of the cases) the religious aspirations are found on the government side, and the rebels are more secular-leaning (the relevant examples here are SPLM in Sudan, LTTE in Sri Lanka, the Maoists in Nepal and the MEK in Iran).

As it is the declaration at the onset of the conflict that determines whether a conflict is considered religious or not, the category of religiously defined conflict is constant over time. Change of positions within an existing rebel-group is not captured, however, which is, admittedly, a limitation with the present data structure. Ideally, we would prefer to have data on parties’ position that vary over time, but that does just not exist at present. The data-structure does nevertheless capture escalation of demands, in those circumstances when there are new rebel formations that express new aspirations.

³ For a detailed discussion about measurement of religiously defined conflicts, see Svensson (2012, 2015).

The dependent variable in this study is third-party mediation, seen as an indication of a conflict resolution process. It is measured on the level of conflict-dyad-year, as mediators are accepted some times, and by some rebel-groups, but not by others. A broad conceptualization of mediation is utilized covering various forms of diplomatic intervention aiming to get the primary parties in conflicts to resolve their conflict and manage their differences.

Table 1. *Distribution of mediation and religious incompatibility*

| | No mediation | Mediation | Total |
|------------------------|---------------------|------------------|--------------|
| No religious | 557 (73%) | 210 (27%) | 767 (100%) |
| Religious | 402 (82%) | 91 (18%) | 493 (100%) |
| incompatibility | | | |
| Total | 959 | 301 | 1,260 |

As shown in Table 1, religiously defined conflicts seem to be associated with a lower degree of third party mediation compared to conflicts where there have not been made any explicit religious demands at the onset of the conflicts. Table 1 displays the number of religious conflicts, and how many of these that are mediated. The unit of analysis is conflict-dyad, and seen on a dyadic perspective, there is overall a relatively low proportion of conflicts that are mediated.⁴ In fact, 18% of the religiously defined conflicts are mediated, whereas the same figure for other types of conflicts are 27%, clear although not dramatically different. This, of course, may be explained by cofounding factors, and therefore Table 2 controls for some of the main explanations for occurrence of mediation, relating to the nature of the conflict.

⁴ There is no detectable increase in mediation activities over time. Although the institutions of mediation have increased immensely over the last years (Lundgren 2014), these efforts have not been directed to the religiously defined armed conflicts around the globe.

Table 2. *Probit analysis of the occurrence of mediation*

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|---|--------|
| Probit regression | Number of obs | = | 1259 |
| | Wald chi2(6) | = | 19.60 |
| | Prob > chi2 | = | 0.0033 |
| Log pseudolikelihood = -663.2283 | Pseudo R2 | = | 0.0422 |

(Std. Err. adjusted for 301 clusters in DyadId)

| Med | Coef. | Robust Std. Err. | z | P> z | [95% Conf. Interval] | |
|-------------------|-----------|------------------|-------|-------|----------------------|-----------|
| Relincomp | -.4264839 | .1657147 | -2.57 | 0.010 | -.7512788 | -.101689 |
| RelID | .1569145 | .204238 | 0.77 | 0.442 | -.2433846 | .5572137 |
| IntensityLevel | .4282774 | .1568932 | 2.73 | 0.006 | .1207723 | .7357824 |
| Territory | -.4238836 | .1930838 | -2.20 | 0.028 | -.8023208 | -.0454463 |
| duration | .0021072 | .0042757 | 0.49 | 0.622 | -.0062729 | .0104874 |
| internationalized | .1212491 | .1860751 | 0.65 | 0.515 | -.2434515 | .4859496 |
| _cons | -.9799066 | .1968902 | -4.98 | 0.000 | -1.365804 | -.5940089 |

In Table 2, all intrastate armed conflicts are analyzed, and we can see that even after controlling for the main factors behind a conflict (intensity, duration, whether it was a territorial or governmental conflict, and whether the conflict was internationalized or not), the religious dimension in the incompatibility seems to be a factors that are negatively associated with the likelihood of mediation. Thus, contentious religious issues, on average, decrease the chance for peacemaking processes. Note, as well, that this does not apply to religious identities: that parties have different religious constituencies have no effect on the likelihood of peacemaking. The general pattern is instead that it is the religious *issues* that are negatively associated with the likelihood of occurrence of mediation. Sacred wars are less likely to be mediated and resolved.

Zooming in on the category of religious incompatibilities, we can start to examine variations within this category. Now the number of observations drastically drop (to 493 conflict-dyad-years), of course, as we are dealing with a sub-category of intrastate armed conflicts: only those that are religiously defined. Within this category, we can see that *issues* cannot explain variations in peacemaking: religiously defined conflicts where the religious issue is central (rather than a marginal issue) are not more or less likely to be open for mediation. Likewise, religiously defined conflicts over territory have no statistically significant relationship with

the occurrence of peacemaking. When it comes to the identity of the belligerents, we can see that religious differences play no role at all in explaining chances for peacemaking. Yet, whether the conflict is internationalized or not, does have a significant and negative effect. Thus, *internationalized* religiously defined conflicts are less likely to be open for conflict resolution.⁵ This is a finding that we will come back to and explore in greater depth in the following narratives of peacemaking in religiously defined conflicts. Lastly, the behavior-dimension (and subsequent dynamic) of religiously defined conflicts seems to play a role: durability of conflicts increases their likelihood of being mediated. This resonates well with the broader picture of armed conflicts shown in other studies, that duration is an important explanation behind negotiated settlement, (Mason and Fett 1996) (although, interestingly, that proposition not find empirical support in Table 2 above). Intensity of conflict cannot explain variations in peacemaking in religiously defined conflicts.

Table 3. *Probit estimates on mediation in religiously defined conflicts*

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|---|--------|
| Probit regression | Number of obs | = | 493 |
| | Wald chi2(6) | = | 15.37 |
| | Prob > chi2 | = | 0.0175 |
| Log pseudolikelihood = -218.91941 | Pseudo R2 | = | 0.0715 |

(Std. Err. adjusted for 83 clusters in DyadId)

| Med | Coef. | Robust Std. Err. | z | P> z | [95% Conf. Interval] | |
|-------------------|-----------|------------------|-------|-------|----------------------|-----------|
| RelCentral | -.1279942 | .3089404 | -0.41 | 0.679 | -.7335064 | .4775179 |
| RelID | -.1050349 | .4193565 | -0.25 | 0.802 | -.9269585 | .7168887 |
| IntensityLevel | .2692727 | .2325904 | 1.16 | 0.247 | -.1865961 | .7251415 |
| internationalized | -.6472678 | .2916386 | -2.22 | 0.026 | -1.218869 | -.0756666 |
| Territory | -.7831862 | .4797142 | -1.63 | 0.103 | -1.723409 | .1570365 |
| duration | .024399 | .0101555 | 2.40 | 0.016 | .0044945 | .0443034 |
| _cons | -.9768904 | .4592016 | -2.13 | 0.033 | -1.876909 | -.0768718 |

In Table 4, we utilized the category of *Jihadist* (defined in terms of Sunni Muslim group fighting for an explicit Islamic cause, where the religious issue is central to their concern). When not controlling for internationalization Jihadist conflicts are less likely to be mediated.

⁵ The standard errors are clustered on the dyadic level (as the observations are not independent of each other). This is arguably the most feasible level on which to cluster the standard errors. If we cluster them on the country-level instead, internationalization fails to be significant, although it is very close to meet the standard level (0.10) of statistical significance.

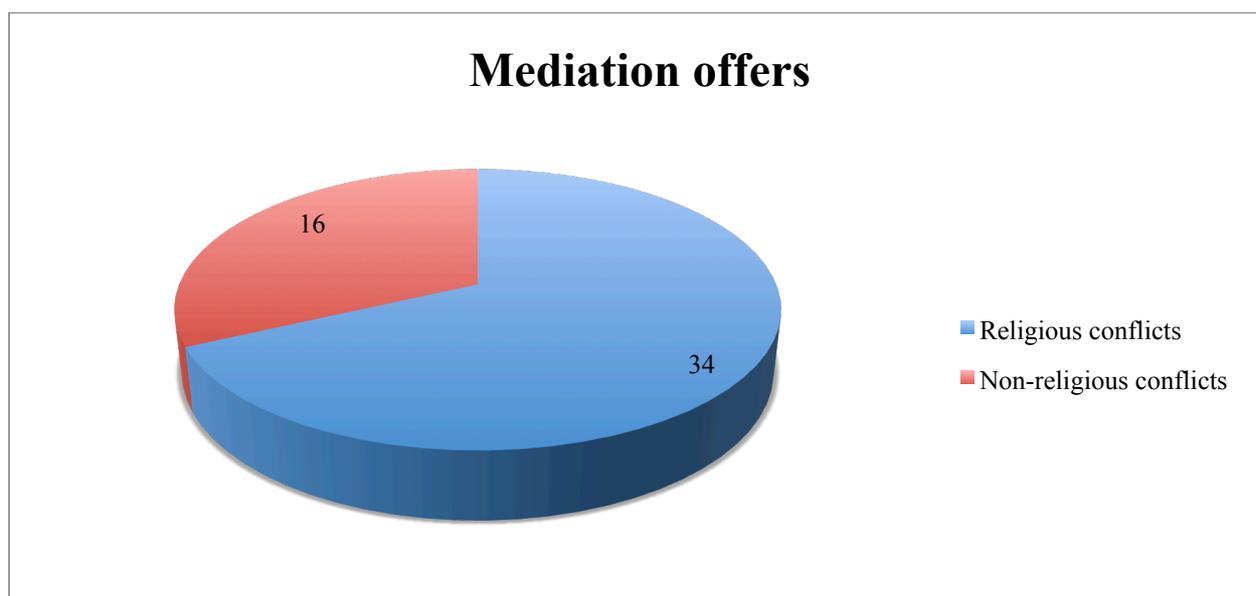
Once internationalization is included in the analysis, the Jihadist factor fails to meet the standard threshold for statistical significance (yet, it is relatively close). Our interpretation is that Jihadist conflicts are among the most difficult of the religiously defined conflicts in terms of conflict resolution, yet it is primarily the international factor associated with many (but not all) of the Jihadist conflicts that accounts for the negative association between Jihadist conflicts.

Table 3. Probit estimates on mediation in religiously defined conflicts

| Probit regression | | | Number of obs | = | 493 | |
|--|-----------|------------------|---------------|-------|----------------------|----------|
| | | | Wald chi2(6) | = | 11.87 | |
| | | | Prob > chi2 | = | 0.0650 | |
| Log pseudolikelihood = -216.27534 | | | Pseudo R2 | = | 0.0828 | |
| (Std. Err. adjusted for 83 clusters in DyadId) | | | | | | |
| Mediation | Coef. | Robust Std. Err. | z | P> z | [95% Conf. Interval] | |
| Jihadist | -.3682059 | .2336981 | -1.58 | 0.115 | -.8262457 | .089834 |
| RelID | -.2251951 | .4050167 | -0.56 | 0.578 | -1.019013 | .5686231 |
| IntensityLevel | .2211009 | .226403 | 0.98 | 0.329 | -.2226408 | .6648426 |
| internationalized | -.5421381 | .2873174 | -1.89 | 0.059 | -1.10527 | .0209936 |
| Incompatibility | .543956 | .5007723 | 1.09 | 0.277 | -.4375397 | 1.525452 |
| Duration | .0205466 | .0096577 | 2.13 | 0.033 | .0016178 | .0394754 |
| _cons | -1.876032 | 1.152678 | -1.63 | 0.104 | -4.13524 | .3831758 |

Mediation is a function both supply of mediation services by third parties, and the acceptance of those offers by parties in conflicts. The occurrence of mediation, in other words, depends on decisions from both primary and third parties. One way to disentangle the demand- and supply analysis is to examine the frequency of mediation offers in armed conflicts. In Table 5, we can see the basic distribution across religious versus non-religiously defined conflicts. Interestingly, more mediation offers were directed towards religiously defined conflicts than to other types of conflicts. This is an indication that any explanation for the lack of mediation in religiously conflict should be sought on the demand-side, rather than the supply-side. In other words, there seems to be mediators ready to serve as third parties even in religiously defined conflicts, but there is reluctance from the parties in conflicts to accept such offers.

Table 5. *Mediation offers (that never were accepted) in armed conflicts, 1989-2013*



To sum up, the global picture revealed by this analysis shows that religiously defined conflicts are less likely, overall, to be mediated. Inside this category, however, there are some interesting variations. It does not seem to be the religious issue that is explaining the variation within religiously defined conflicts in being open for mediation. Instead, whether the religiously defined conflicts are internationalized has a negative effect, and the religiously defined conflicts' durability has by contrast a positive effect on the chances of peacemaking.

Cases of International Mediation in Religiously Defined Conflicts

This section examines a set of contemporary (post-1989) cases of peacemaking processes in jihadist armed conflicts. The aim is to clarify the causal processes of conflict resolution in religiously framed conflicts. In this study, we have identified some of the main mediation

efforts in religiously defined conflicts, although the list of the cases here is not exclusive.⁶

Based on the analysis of the cases, six observations can be made.

Table 2. *Example of mediation processes in jihadist armed conflicts*

| Conflict | Year | Religious dimension | Mediators | Religious mediators? | Outcome? |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|--|--------------------|----------------------|---|
| Afghanistan – Taleban | 2012 | Demands for Islamic state | Qatar | No | Mediation attempt fails |
| Algeria – AIS | 1994-1995 | Demands for Islamic state | Sant'Egidio | Yes | The government rejects suggested peace platform |
| Egypt – Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya | 1993 | Demands for Islamic state | Muslim Brotherhood | Yes | The government calls off talks |
| Israel – Hamas | 2014 | Demands for Islamic state | Egypt | No | Cease-fire |
| Mali – Ansar Dine | 2012-2013 | Demands for Islamic state | ECOWAS | No | Breakdown in talks, cease-fire violated |
| Philippines – MILF | 2001-2014 | Independent Islamic Bangsamoro | Malaysia | No | Peace agreement |
| Somalia – ARS | 2008 | Holy war against the regime and Ethiopia | UN | No | Peace agreement, continued conflict |
| Tajikistan – UTO | 1994-1997 | IRPs goal: Tajikistan united by Islamic principles | UN | No | Peace agreement |
| Thailand – Patani insurgents | 2013- | Islamic Sultanate | Malaysia | No | Ongoing peace process |

⁶ Three other cases of religiously based third party actors mediating in religiously defined conflicts can be mentioned in this context: in 2004, Iraq's top Shi-ite religious authorities including Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and al-Hawzah (a Shi-ite religious seminary) mediated the conflict between the Iraqi government and the Al-Mahdi Army, Ansar al-Islam and the Islamic State of Iraq. In the same year, members of three local Islamic Committees mediated talks between the Thai government and insurgents in Southern Thailand. In 2014 there were rumors that Nigeria's government had negotiated a ceasefire with the Islamic group Boko Haram, something that was later denied by the rebel group.

A first observation in relation to the empirical cases of mediation in jihadist conflicts is that jihadist conflicts do not come across, overall, as very different in the way of their conflict dynamics, if compared to other types of conflicts. Parties in religiously defined conflicts are affected by the costs of conflicts and react to those costs in terms of an increased openness to seek resolutions to the conflicts. In several of the cases of religiously defined conflicts, there were costs of conflicts that provided the basic rationale for seeking to engage in mediated interventions. Hamas in Palestine, MILF in the Philippines and AIS in Algeria were all incentivized by the mounting costs of the continuous conflict to explore alternative routes through third party assisted negotiations.

A second observation from these cases is that the religious issues were dealt with in quite interesting, and theoretically surprising, ways in the conflict resolution processes. If it were the religious issues that made religiously defined conflicts intractable, as has dominated the theoretical discussion (see above) then we might expect to see a lot of contention around religious issues in the resolution processes. Actually, this is not what is happening. In some cases, such as Ansar Dine in Mali, USC in Somalia and IRP in Tajikistan, the religious issues are indeed central to the debate and resolution attempts. Yet, the religious issues seem to be resolved: in the Mali case through a regional application of *sharia*, in Somalia, by adapting *sharia* as the basis for legislation (in an attempt to marginalize the al-Shabaab), and in Tajikistan by allowing religious parties to contest in the national elections. There are situations where the question of religiously defined laws is in fact put on the negotiation table. Mali is a case in point. Ansar Dine, a Tuareg Islamist movement, was formed by Iyad Ag Ghali in November 2011, shortly after MNLA had been established. Ghali failed to reform MNLA towards jihadist goals and therefore left the movement. The primary goal for Ansar Dine is to establish an Islamic state with Sharia laws in Mali or in an independent north.

Ansar Dine has been able to combine Tuareg secessionist nationalism with an Islamic ideology (Gaasholt, 2013: 70; Lecocq et al., 2013: 346, Klute, 2013: 62-63). In 2012 negotiations took place between Ansar Dine and the government, with the ECOWAS-appointed mediator Burkinabe President Blaise Compaoré. In November that year the official mediation process continued in Ouagadougou, as well as unofficial talks in Algiers, where Iyad Ag Ghali was rumored to be present (UCDP, 2014). At the talks key questions such as Ansar Dine's demand to impose sharia in Mali and the possibilities to establish autonomy in the north were discussed. In early November an envoy of Ansar Dine, Mohamed Aharid, met with Compaoré, and declared that the group "rejects all forms of extremism and terrorism" – a clear reference to the demands to break their ties with AQIM and MUJAO (although there were doubts about the sincerity of this Ansar Dine's promise, see Pflanz (2012)). The group also said it was willing to renounce its goal of imposing sharia throughout the country, only insisting to keep it in the town Kidal. Thus, the parties in Mali could reach agreement on the religious dimension of the conflict. In the other cases of conflicts, the religious issues played a very marginal role in the peacemaking process. The main challenge seems not to have been to agree on the religious dimension: it was not religious issues that stood in the way of making progress towards peace. Hence, rarely it seems to be the religious dimension per se, which is serving as an obstacle for effective conflict resolution. Another example of a recent solution is to be found in the Philippines. Peace talks between the Philippine government and MILF took place between 1997-2014, although this period had several break-downs along the way. Malaysia intervened as facilitator in 2001 and has been acting as the main mediator in the peace process between the parties, assisted by an international network of countries as well as international civil society organizations. MILF signed a comprehensive peace agreement with the government in March 2014. This agreement, the *Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro*, implied a formal ending of the intrastate conflict, although the implementation

process will be a challenging endeavor, although current events may jeopardize its implementation. A key dimension of the agreement is the ministerial form of government in the Bangsamoro region, which differs significantly from the general Philippine constitutional system with its presidential focus. Hence, the agreement that was reached created another type of governing structure in the region compared to the governing structure of the central government. Throughout the negotiations this was one of the key points, and it had some resonance in religious ideologies, since the MILF considered the ministerial form of government more in line with what they perceived to be a deliberation culture anchored in, and central to, their Islamic tradition.

A third observation drawn from the study of contemporary mediation processes in jihadist armed conflicts is that it is not uncommon that the uncompromising position is found on the secular-leaning government, rather than amongst the religious militants. The Egyptian government feared the attempts of Muslim Brotherhood to serve as a bridge between the militants and the government, and therefore rejected the initiatives and repressed the Brotherhood. In November 1994, Sant'Egidio, a Catholic community in the Vatican, arranged a meeting in Rome, with an agenda to draft a plan on how to end the war in Algeria. While the Algerian government declined to attend, most of the major Algerian opposition parties, including FIS, came to the meeting. The opposition parties had received more than 80 percent of the votes in the parliamentary elections in 1991. This was the first time that FIS agreed to sit down with Algeria's secular parties and showed willingness to compromise (Viorst, 1997: 96). In January 1995 the parties signed a proposal, called "a platform for a political and peaceful solution of the Algerian crisis" or "The Rome platform", which was perceived as an agenda to begin talks with the government. The main significance of the proposal was the commitment to basic democratic principles and secured several major concessions made by

FIS. The party distanced itself from the theocratic and anti-democratic positions it had advocated in 1989-1992 and publicly committed itself to democratic principles, such as political pluralism, respect for human rights and equality of gender. The platform also rejected the use of violence as a means of acceding to power or maintaining it. Taken together the promises given by FIS in the proposal sharply distinguished the party from the extreme revolutionary discourse of GIA, although some links remained between the groups (Roberts, 1995: 242; Roberts, 2004: 172-173). A set of conditions that would have to precede negotiations included the release of the FIS leaders and the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry that would investigate acts of violence and serious violations of human rights (Ciment, 1997: 164). Roberts described the Rome proposal a platform that offered “all sides of Algeria’s terrible drama an honourable way out” (1995: 242). Yet, the Algerian government too rejected the platform, describing it as an unacceptable ultimatum (Ciment, 1997: 164). The Algerian army had seen the meetings in Rome as a threat as they feared the militarily more superior Islamists. Instead of seeking an agreement with the opposition parties the government wanted to maneuver FIS from the political scene through constitutional changes (Martinez, 2004: 18; Viorst 1997: 97). Thus, the Algerian government did not attend the mediation attempt by Sant’Egidio and rejected the negotiated so-called Rome platform, despite the fact that AIS made significant concessions along the religious-secular dimension. Likewise, in Afghanistan, it was the government that reacted to the imaging of the Taleban in Qatar, and thereby decided to end those particular negotiation efforts. Thus, it was the government-side that, in all of these cases, terminated the mediation initiatives. In Mali, the process broke down because of violent provocations by Ansar Dine, but in no other of the cases studied, was the obstructing side the religious rebels. Governments’ decisions, of course, can be strategic (anticipating reactions from the militants), yet, it is still noteworthy that to some extent the main intransigence was to be found on the side of the governments.

A fourth observation is that the cases that we have examined are overrepresented by conflicts where the rebels in their orientation are domestically focused, rather than focused on the global (Jihadist) networks. Even though there were various sorts of connections to global jihadist networks, in the conflicts in Tajikistan, Thailand, Algeria, Egypt, Palestine and the Philippines, the main concerns and aspirations of the rebels seem to have been their respective domestic agenda. Thus, several of the religiously defined conflicts in which conflict resolution processes occurred, were conflicts where the rebels were *not* belonging to the international Jihadist networks. The Patani insurgents, engaged in an on-going peace efforts led by Malaysia, were locally oriented and their demands (although a lot of un-clarity remains over their explicit demands due to the secret nature of their organizational structures) seem to have been oriented against creating a separate state in the Southern Thailand, rather than connecting to any transnational network. Likewise, although MILF in the Philippines is only one of several armed groups which is onboard the peace process, this agreement could potentially provide the basis for stability and normalcy, as well as for economic and political development, in the Bangsamoro region. Interesting to note is that those groups that are challenging the peace process, BIFM and Abu Sayyaf, are also those most closely associated with the international Jihadist-networks, whereas MILF throughout the conflict (although maintaining contacts and certain acts of solidarity within the Islamic movement) never was a branch of the global Jihadist movement.

We may also observe that in most of the religiously defined conflicts that have experienced conflict resolution processes, there have been divisions among the broader rebel movement. The analysis of the individual cases reveals some interesting *intra-movement variations*: conflict resolution processes occur amongst those factions that are more domestically

oriented, rather than internationally linked. For example, in the Philippines, the MILF were ready to engage in peacemaking, whereas the groups Abu Sayyaf and BIFM, both more closely linked to international Jihadist networks, rejected any moves towards the resolution of the conflict. In Somalia, the Islamic Courts (as part of a broader coalition) went to the peace talks in Djibouti, whereas the al-Shabaab rejected those talks. Likewise, MIA and GIA in Algeria – connected to the international Jihadist networks – never accepted the Rome platform that AIS agreed to, and eventually also rejected the amnesty deals that ended the military conflict. Thus, the broader movements of religiously inspired rebel-groups have been divided in many of these conflicts, and there have been groups open for seeking negotiations and mediated talks, although these have been challenged by more radical and internationalized spoiler groups. Future research needs to better understand how intra-movement divisions can create opening for conflict resolution, it is important not to treat the opposition in religiously defined conflicts as a single block.

Lastly, the sixth observation of the mediation processes of jihadist armed conflicts is that there are, in some of these cases, *variations over time* that relates to the openness for conflict resolution. In some of these cases, it is when the conflicts are de-internationalized (or at least moving in that direction), that the parties show an increase willingness to engage in conflict resolution processes. In Afghanistan, anticipating decreased American-led international involvement, clearly related to the willingness of the Taleban for engaging in peace talks. In Tajikistan there is also a development over time: the religiously defined rebel-group (IPR) shifted in its emphasis from an Islamic agenda towards a more nationalistic agenda, and concurrently also increasingly disengaged from the regional, international Islamist and Jihadist networks. According to Olimova and Olimov “[a] major achievement of the Tajik peace process is that it facilitated the peaceful incorporation of Islamicist movements into the

constitutional political process” (2001: 27). The peace agreement, forged under mediation in 1994 by the UN as a mediator, focused on power-sharing and was the first agreement in the region where the secular parties were forced to share power with an Islamic opposition. In 2000 IRP had become one of the biggest political parties in Tajikistan, and party members filled most of the government positions allocated to UTO (Olimova and Olimov, 2001: 27). IRP connected Islamic views with the nationalist identity in Tajikistan and was popular among a local regionalist faction (the Gharmis). The connection to national identities is a reason why the Islamist party was able to collaborate with the other opposition parties in UTO (Roy, 2000: 9-10). In the process of becoming a legitimate political party, IRP lost most of its “Islamic” nature and became a Tajik party. IRP’s main broker became Russia and the party started to distance itself from Iran and radical Sunni movements (Roy, 2000: 23-25).

Conclusions: Internationalization and Conflict Resolution

This paper has examined the occurrence of mediation, but that is, admittedly, just one type of conflict resolution process, and the outcome of these mediation efforts are not the focus of this paper. There is clearly a need to know more about the conditions under which religiously defined conflicts are mitigated, managed and resolved. Still, little empirical work has been done on the peacemaking processes in religiously defined conflicts. Indeed, Hasenclever and Rittberger correctly identified that there not much ‘systematic research on adequate strategies for dealing peacefully with conflicts which include a religious dimension’ (Hasenclever and Rittberger 2000). Future research therefore needs to focus attention to the short- as well as long-term effects of international mediation in sacred wars, as well as examining other forms of conflict resolution and management of religious revolts. Yet, this study is at least starting to move in that direction. It has tried to address the question of why mediation occurs in religiously defined conflicts under some conditions but not others. The statistical analysis

indicated some preliminary empirical results pointing to two main factors in accounting for readiness to engage in mediation: costs of conflicts (as indicated in the measure of conflict duration), and degree of internationalization (in the form of active troops on the ground). These, as well as the other independent variables utilized in the quantitative analysis are, admittedly, rough measures. These were therefore also complemented by a more fine-grained analysis of some of the contemporary peace processes in religiously defined conflicts. The cases are all religiously defined and all of them contained some conflict resolution processes. Hence, the case studies are not comparative, but rather aimed for identifying the causal processes, which is ideal for theory development purposes. Yet, there are also some interesting variations in these case studies that can be utilized and these variations show some support for how the internationalization factor affects the chance for conflict resolution.

Overall, the internationalization comes out as a strong factor, both from the statistical analysis as well as the studies of the cases. In some sense, religious militants can be seen as parasitizing on local grievances and domestic disputes, by drawing these into a global dynamic and grander ideological battle. This implies that religious conflicts that are internationalized will be harder to resolve, not only because the number of stake-holders have increased, but because the local dynamics have shifted into a regional or even global interaction. Many militant religious ideologies have transnational characters and therefore are potentially rife for international involvement by external actors. In other words, conflicts that started out with particular and context-specific demands and aspirations are transformed, through their organizational and ideological ties, to broader dynamics. In relation to Jihadist conflicts this process can be labeled *trans-jihadization*: a process where local disputes are transformed and utilized in a larger global campaign, with the explicit aim of creating religiously based state-formations that go beyond ethnic boundaries and existing state border.

The overall conclusion of this study is that it is the trans-jihadization rather than other characteristics of religiously defined conflicts that obstructs peacemaking processes.

To conclude, the best explanations for the intractability of religious conflicts are not related to the religious issues themselves, as much as the degree of internationalization. The conflict duration and internationalization were the two factors in the statistical analysis that were associated with the occurrence of conflict resolution processes, and the empirical analysis of the contemporary cases reveals that these factors indeed seem to be relevant in accounting for the readiness to engage in peacemaking. In that sense, the religiously defined conflicts are not very different from other types of political violence: previous research has found strong support for duration and internationalization are explanations for conflict resolution. At the same time, there are also reasons to believe that religious ideologies have particular propensities to transnationalize and that religious networks can be globalized. Thus, those religiously defined conflicts that are not internationalized are more likely to be open for peacemaking processes.

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